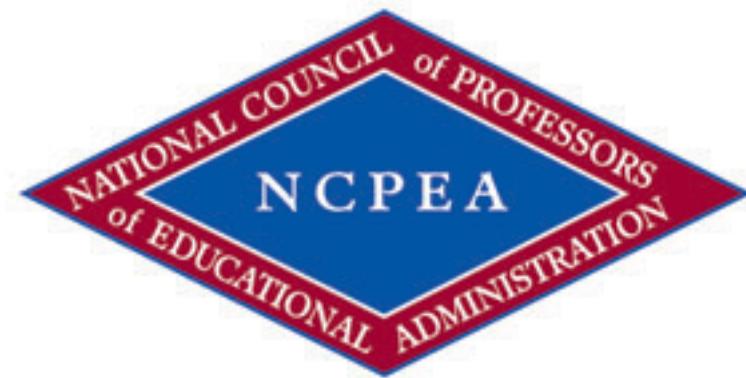


THE FIRST 60 DAYS: EARLY IMPLICATIONS FROM A PRACTITIONER IN TRANSITION TO A PROFESSOR^{*}

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1 NCPEA Publications



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2 Sumario en español

La decisión de dejar un gran ganar exitoso profesional y potencial para comenzar de nuevo como un principiante con nuevos alrededores y las esperanzas no son hechas sin consideración de una serie ancha de variables.

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Hacer la transición a la educación superior no fue un fácil uno y la transición misma han presentado varios otros desafíos y las alegrías que he sido favorecido a compartir. Compartir mi transición a enseñar en la educación superior por esta narrativa informal empieza con una experiencia muy personal que es pertinente como siendo un catalizador para la transición.

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

3 Introduction

The decision to leave a successful career and great earning potential to start over as a novice with new surroundings and expectations is not made without consideration of a wide array of variables. Making the transition to higher education was not an easy one and the transition itself has presented various other challenges and joys that I have been encouraged to share. Sharing my transition to teaching in higher education through this informal narrative begins with a very personal experience that is relevant as being a catalyst for the transition.

My career as a public school administrator lasted 11 years and in the ninth year, my family suffered two significant losses and consequently changed our outlook on numerous facets of our lives. Each being very driven and focused professionals my husband, also a public school administrator, and I discovered we were going through the motions of life without living it. After trying to continue our routines as they were before our losses, we discovered the need to grasp more from our lives than we were experiencing. The opportunity to move into higher education was presented and we chose to move across the country and endure a significant financial loss so we could grow again as a family in an area of exquisite resources. The purpose of this reflection is to share candidly the experiences that helped me transition from practitioner to professor.

A brief review of literature indicated a need for research in the area of educational leaders transitioning to a professorship and specifically the viewpoint of an assistant professor in the midst of the transition. Through a narrative approach, I address the thought process supporting the decision to transition to the professorship, the mutual selection, the offer, the preparation, the first weeks, and advice from the novice.

4 Related Literature

New faculty must realize and adapt to the vast differences in culture and politics when moving from a public school setting into the professorate (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2005). Practitioners often struggle in transitioning from situations in which the job performance expectations were clearly defined into the professorate role in which there are numerous unwritten regulations (Kinsey et al. 2006).

The lack of consistency in the new professor's and the university's expectations of the role can be frustrating (Sawyer, Prichard, and Hostetler, 1992; Johnson & DeSpain, 2004). The inception of the professorship often includes varied messages regarding service, teaching, and research and the impact each has on acquiring tenure (Aguirre, 2000; Van Patten, 1995; Olmstead, 1993). Additionally, without the mentoring and collegiality often provided in the practitioner realm, new faculty often experience feelings of alienation and isolation (Piercy, Giddings, Allen, Dixon, Meszaros, and Joest, 2005). According to Sawyer, Prichard, and Hostetler (1992) the new job can leave some novice professors feeling they have gotten "stuck in a difficult or possibly intolerable situation (p. 156)."

Literature that addresses the challenges of moving from a doctoral student into the professorate is available; however, there is limited literature supporting the transition from a practicing professional educator to the professorate. The differences in the principalship and professorship, in addition to limited available literature, became the impetus for disclosing the unique perspectives of early transition experiences and offering insight into the first 60 days to others considering the transition from practitioner to professor.

5 The Decision to Make a Professional Transition

The desire for something more challenging and the accomplishment of established personal and professional goals serves as an encouragement to evaluate whether or not potential roles of various levels of career advancement continue to be attractive.

Advancement in the field of educational administration came early in my tenure as a result of being employed in what I termed a “mega district” of over 55,000 students just north of Houston, Texas. The district opened at least one school per year, if not multiple schools, each year before my departure. Given the growth the district experienced, there would have been many opportunities for additional promotions in my career as an administrator in the next ten years which included opening new campuses or advancing to a central office position.

I enjoyed being a competitor in a high-stakes, giftedly staffed organization that allowed me to advance quickly early in my career. My career seemed stable, predictable, and comfortable with accolades for leading an at-risk, diverse campus to recognition for academic achievement, being selected as a regional principal of the year, finalist for state principal of the year, and helping the campus earn the National Panasonic School Change Award in 2011, my final year at the campus. Still, the lure of the professorship outweighed my success and offered a challenge unavailable in public education.

I always had the desire to move into higher education, but I anticipated it would be toward the end of a long career as a practitioner. The decision to make a professional transition at the age of 37 came with a careful evaluation of the potential career paths and consideration of several factors. I am competitive and I enjoyed a work environment that employed other exceptional leaders who challenged me to stay current and be creative in order to remain a competitor.

The leadership of an at-risk campus required my attentiveness to current research and gave me the desire to become a leader among my peers in the field. The pressure to perform and ensure that my campus’ scores on state-mandated tests did not contribute to district-level score decreases fueled my intense work patterns, patterns on which I thrived. A career in higher education would not offer such intense, overt competition. The competition would be with self and internal motivation to publish and receive promotion and tenure.

The next progressive career advancement opportunities as a practitioner included opening a new junior high campus, or moving into high school leadership or district-level leadership. I had just finished seven years as a leader of a campus that was overwhelmingly exhausting to serve with a large population of students who had more social and emotional needs that were outside the scope of the field of education than my limited staff could support. Respected principals were chosen to open new campuses, however, to me opening a new campus was unattractive for an unexplainable reason. Moving to a high school principalship in the area was another option. Though this position held the challenges that met my professional desire and competitive appetite, it was even more life consuming than a junior high campus and the family sacrifices were unattractive. Accepting a district-level leadership position would distance me from students and require a response to issues that were already addressed by a very capable, talented group of campus administrators. The inability to decide on an attractive path in public education and my family’s desire to make a significant change led me to investigate opportunities outside of the practitioner arena.

5.1 The Lure of Higher Education

The lure of higher education came in various forms that included the desire to share my experiences with aspiring leaders, to research and write, and to have self-imposed rather than externally imposed stress. Eleven years as a school administrator is not an exceptional amount of experience, however those years were spent in a very large district and at campuses with high percentages of students in various subpopulations. Time at those campuses provided me with situations that administrators in smaller school districts might not experience. The experiences included weapons on campus, contentious special education issues, teacher arrests, and a student suicide. Additionally, I helped transform the campus to a learning community that valued retaining staff, setting norms, aligning curriculum, and transforming the classrooms into positive environments where teachers addressed learning styles and the social and emotional needs present in early teen years.

The experiences at this campus as well as the staff development provided at the district level gave me the inspiration and desire to research and write. Leading a campus requires one's undivided attention and time, as does research, which became for me another lure to higher education. Though the pressure to publish can be intimidating at first, for me it was the challenge I was missing as a practitioner. The professorship offers advantages on a personal level as well. Teaching graduate students in the evening frees the daytime for research, planning, and writing, but it also allows for flexibility as a parent. As a campus administrator, attending my child's field trips, productions, and class gatherings were dependent upon the state of my campus at the time of the event. Finally, the desire to have self-imposed stress rather than externally imposed stress made higher education attractive. The principalship required me to make rapid-fire decisions for issues that were created or caused by external factors and actions of others that were out of my control. The professorship has ample stress, however it is all relative to my work effort and the ability to manage my time efficiently.

5.2 The Disadvantages of Higher Education

An impediment to transitioning from a K-12 setting into higher education is the salary, which in my case was half of the salary earned as a principal. A plan for addressing the salary difference included carefully selecting the location of the university by comparing the cost of living prices. Financial stability is important, but getting rich was never a high personal priority as evidenced in my selection of education as a profession.

The workload at the university level in comparison to the K-12 level is not reduced; it is vastly different. The flexibility in the day to accomplish the varied tasks must be well managed. The time constraints and availability of stakeholders often required that tasks be completed in a given timeframe as a principal. Not so as a professor. Endless grading, the pressure to publish, conscientious student advisement, and class preparation are recurring activities, but can be completed at all hours including late nights. Time management is still essential in the professorship as it was in the principalship, however shifting from a set schedule as a principal to a prioritized, self-paced, self-disciplined time management plan has taken a determined effort.

An indescribable mental shift is required to be productive and maintain the pace as a professor. I was conditioned to perform at intense physical, mental, and emotional levels as a principal. As a professor, only the mental realm is targeted and my physical and emotional patterns have had to be adjusted and fulfilled outside of the work environment. I was surprised to find myself fatigued the first three to four weeks after my contract began since I had no interruptions, sat behind a desk planning and writing for hours at a time, and made very few decisions - actions opposite of those experienced as a principal.

The scrutiny an educational leader undergoes in K-12 service is from a diverse group that includes parents, community members, teachers, school board members, students, and central administrators. Each of the above expects the administrator to meet or exceed what his or her past experiences or current political agenda has framed the ideal image to be of that leader as a performer. Scrutiny in the professorship comes from completely different sources that directly impact a young professor's actions and thoughts. Department chair evaluations, acceptance or rejection letters from publishers, annual student evaluations, and local school district expectations of support combine to provide evaluation on production rather than performance.

6 The Mutual Selection Process

The process of moving into higher education was a well thought-out, time intensive, long-range planning period that lasted approximately six months before the acceptance of a position. Various online job banks regularly advertise searches for professors and allow filtering for various categories, and all were advantageous since multiple factors were considered in selecting the universities to which I would send an application.

My husband and I had secure, established, well-compensated positions in the school district. To sacrifice that security, the relocation would have to be to an area that was completely different from the surroundings we enjoyed in Houston and allow us the desired recreational opportunities which typically were those associated with mountainous regions. Additionally, finding quality schools for our child, considering the cost

of living in comparison to that of Houston, and the climate were each important. My personal preferences centered on east coast universities or Rocky Mountain area universities while at the same time considering some southern universities in order to remain close to family.

I was hopeful that one of two universities would contact me for an interview and was relieved and accepted the first university's offer that began with a preliminary phone interview. The posting for the position was made by the university in early fall of 2010, and the call for a phone interview was not made until early spring, 2011. Discouraged between the posting time and the actual contact time, I mentally moved my aspirations away from university work to options available as a practitioner. So, when the phone interview offer was made, I approached it casually as though I were indifferent about the potential changes that I would face if I were to be offered a university position.

The phone interview allowed for my introduction to a professional, polite, yet jovial group of professors who should probably have seemed intimidating, but given my casual approach and self-perceived under-qualified status, I entered the interview with the "learning experience" attitude and assumption. Much to my surprise, I was contacted a week later and offered the opportunity to be flown across the country for a more intensive three-day interview. The personal side of the mutual selection had been made and the effort to encourage the university's selection was under way. I was overcome with a feeling of anxious-excitement and an urge to be creative in my approach to their requested presentations.

6.1 A University Interview

The chairman of the selection committee was an outstanding communicator and responded patiently to my many questions. A final email before my departure for the interview highlighted my schedule for the trip. Each minute was well planned and every meal was covered and scheduled with multiple professors and students, allowing ample time for me to investigate the campus' organizational health and time for the selection committee to determine what value I could add to the department.

My preparation before departing for the interview was extensive as I organized my thoughts and mentally reviewed my accomplishments. I had never prepared for a university interview and had not applied for any other position the prior five years so I had few resources from which to draw. I read extensively online and used the University Council for Education Administration's (UCEA) *Job Search Handbook* located on their website to organize my interview materials. I also gleaned from the phone interview that I would be expected to support both metropolitan and rural schools and districts so I prepared a standards-based, electronic presentation through Power Point and hyperlinked professional artifacts for each of the state's administrator standards. My effort in doing so was to showcase my experiences as a school leader as well as demonstrate my readiness for the expectations outlined for the position of assistant professor.

The provided interview schedule included a one to two hour window for a presentation that was expected to include something from my research agenda. Fortunately, I had presented my research the prior November at the UCEA conference so I had a prepared presentation. Though I was comfortable with the presentation expectation, I wanted to ensure I had time to cover the application presentation highlighting the documents supporting the state standards. I also wanted to make a short, three to four slide presentation about my family and reasons for seeking the position so I could offer information the committee was prevented from asking. A carefully and deliberately planned presentation would demonstrate my interests as a researcher, my ability as a practitioner, and my value of family.

A highlight of the on-campus experience was the search committee's effort to make the interview process informative not only about the university but also about the community. The three-day schedule included short introduction sessions with multiple professors, meals with students and faculty, the presentations, suggested adventures for my husband and son who accompanied me, and a guided tour of the town by a real estate agent.

Perhaps the most informative meeting happened on the last day of the interview process with the chair of the search committee over coffee at a local bagel shop. I perceived my practitioner career to be stable and progressing comfortably so I had many questions about the leadership of the university, college, and department as well as the long-term security of the vacant assistant professorship during a time of budget

reductions and criticism of the university's administration in local press. My questions were answered and my fears subsided with his sincere responses to my concerns and his regard for my opinion of the state of things at the university. It might have been risky to ask some of the questions I did, but I had nothing to lose and I refused to enter into an agreement that required me to move across the country and take a significant reduction in salary only to find the position eliminated in a few years or worse, a poor working environment.

6.2 The Offer

Significant family discussion was held to determine what our response would be if an offer were made. When the call came from the department chair asking permission to forward my name to the dean as their recommended candidate, I should have been prepared but I was not. I did not expect to be a top candidate, because I lacked the research experience and my knowledge of the surrounding area was limited.

A week later, a letter arrived from the Dean of the College of Education and even more surprising than the selection itself was an offer including \$4000.00 more than what the position advertised as a starting salary, a new computer, and several thousand dollars to be used toward moving expenses. I knew I could earn more money at a different institution or by staying in the high paying school district; however, money was never what made the transition attractive. I was not prepared to negotiate. Positions with the school district never allowed for salary negotiations until one reached the high school principal position and beyond. I suspect I could have negotiated for a higher salary from the university, but I felt the offer was reasonable and acceptable given it also included an attractive six-hour course load each semester for the first year.

I signed the offer and mailed it back to the university. Two days later, I needed reassurance that relinquishing my status, security, and potential promotions in public education was the right decision and that the university position was stable during this recession. After contacting the dean and asking her about the security of the position, when I would receive a contract, the duration of the contract, and a final discussion with my family, we decided to make the leap.

7 Preparation and Inception

Leaving a 16-year career and moving across the country was challenging and required both personal and professional preparation to depths that were unanticipated.

7.1 Personal Challenges

I underestimated the first challenge to entering the professorship. I knew that leaving a career and friends who supported us through our losses and shared in our lives would be difficult, but moving across the country after selling a home of ten years that was surrounded not only by bricks and mortar, but also a community of friends and memories was emotionally draining and at the same time physically taxing in the Texas heat. Added to the emotional experience were financial concerns. Unfortunately the moving allotment provided by the university only covered a small portion of the complete cost. Additionally, we were concerned about my husband's unemployment status for the first time since he was 16, a home that was in the final negotiations of a sale but not closed, and a month without a paycheck. Careful planning had allowed for a two-month budget, but anything beyond that time without the sale of the house would be detrimental to our financial well being.

Searching for a teaching or administrative position for my husband presented us with an unexpected challenge. Leaving an area that routinely hired 600 to 1000 teachers per year and entering an area that hired only a fraction of that number created a feeling of fear and uncertainty.

My husband's effort to find a position began with visits to the campuses in the local district with vacancies listed online only to return home after 20 minutes frustrated with the news that all were filled. A search of surrounding districts revealed one assistant principal position 40 miles north of our residence. Relief came when he received a phone call for an interview, then overwhelming celebration when he was offered the position.

7.2 Professional Preparation

Teaching, to me, has always been the most attractive part of the field of education so once the boxes were unpacked, I eagerly arranged a time to get my office assignment, keys, and texts so I could begin settling in and planning for my course load. Not surprising, just as K-12 teachers often raid furniture and supplies from departing teachers, so do professors. The office furniture in the vacant offices had been scavenged before my arrival. Though my office as a principal was large and had top-of-the-line modern furniture, I was pleased with my small but amply spaced office and 1960s furniture because it had a window that allowed natural light and overlooked a courtyard with a mountainous backdrop. Even more impressive was the technology available to professors that included a MacBook Pro computer and a large external screen that appeared within a few days of my arrival on campus.

The three weeks I spent arranging my office, preparing a syllabus, and entering assignments into the university's on-line system were the most valuable of the summer.

The first week on contract allowed only one full day for preparation and I was relieved that most of mine was complete and I could participate in department and college meetings without distraction.

8 Observations and Advice from a Novice

For someone who operated under a sense of urgency for 11 years as a campus administrator, the transition to long-range, ongoing projects that take months and potentially years to complete rather than rapid-fire problem solving left a feeling of indescribable ineptness and loss of control.

Employment in the same school district for fourteen years allowed me to foster professional relationships and an understanding of systems in place. I underestimated the disconnection I would feel once removed from those familiar relationships and systems. Eventually, I came to realize that I had moved from the "saving the world" mindset to a "contributing to the world" idea. The hands-on witness of change in students and their life patterns was no longer observed. Instead, the many experiences I enjoyed as a practitioner were a result of shared teaching, service, and research contributions to the field of education. In just 60 days, I came to experience and observe various differences and feel positioned to offer those observations and stories in an effort to advise others who are considering the transition to professor.

8.1 Committee Selection

The realization and understanding that my colleagues want me to be successful was apparent from the inception of my arrival with the offering of course materials and even dinner to help my young son meet other children. My experience has been that professors are humanistic educators at the core and advice is generally given so that new professors are successful and retained as was the case with two well-intentioned professors at a faculty meeting over breakfast one morning.

When I was new to the principalship, I proudly supported a select group of campus teachers as they wrote a \$30,000 grant provided by Hewlett Packard in hopes of receiving laptops and other equipment. When the campus was awarded the grant, I learned through verbal and informal reprimand that there was a school district policy in place for grant writing that included the approval of central administration and the school board, which I had not sought. I learned to inquire about any policies or procedures regarding campus decisions that might not follow typical school patterns. Having learned to seek permission in the public education sector, I have found it even more important in higher education. Such is the case with committee selection. Getting permission, potentially multiple times, from multiple levels rather than going straight to the chair of the committee to express your interest is protocol. The rationale for getting permission appears to be the need for the department to keep a balance of experience and varied department representation, and the chairs are responsible for monitoring the balance.

Carefully examining the list of committees that is disseminated to determine if there is any representation from the educational leadership department can help predict what will be asked of you, based on need. My colleagues had been part of many of the listed committees in the past and had suggestions about which ones best suited me. The departmental meeting at a local breakfast favorite included a discussion about which

committee(s) would be selected for my placement. I sat across from the two colleagues with whom I work most closely, and when the name of a committee was presented, one colleague made eye contact with me and shook her head “no” and the other colleague coughed and said “yes” leaving me to wonder whose advice to follow. We have had a few chuckles about it since.

I selected an ad-hoc committee that was closely related to a K-12 district-level committee I served on as a principal. I have always been interested in recruitment and retention and it seemed like a potential research topic in the future so I was pleased when the department chair recommended me for that committee. From what I have been told, but have yet to experience, some committees can be time consuming and impede a professor’s time for research. Also, some committees hold more political value than others, and from my observations thus far, it is wise to avoid those the first few years and focus on research and teaching.

8.2 Presence on Campus

Researchers have found that the retention of new faculty often depends on the presence or absence of collegiality (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004; Erickson & Rodriguez, 1999). Tompkins (1992) and Whitt (1991) identified a significant area of dissatisfaction among professors regarding personal interaction between professors, particularly junior and senior professors.

My experience during the first 60 days has been filled with collegiality. One of the advantages of teaching graduate students is that their classes are in the evenings and they generally do not visit your office during the day, which leaves an open daytime schedule. Days are generally filled with research, grading, and planning which can be completed on campus or at home. However, I have noticed that I miss the camaraderie and feel disconnected when I choose to work at home, and I have gained more collegiality by working in my office. The informal discussions and availability of colleagues to discuss ideas are among the advantages to working on campus. Working in the office setting also creates opportunities for collegial rapport and familiarity.

8.3 Class Structure

I felt relieved when a colleague invited me into his office and graciously piled binders of class materials and syllabi into my arms then qualified the gift with a sincere effort to support me in class preparation. I had selected texts and begun mapping the courses based on catalog descriptions and state standards, but having a recent syllabus, and in some cases more than one generated by additional professors from prior semesters, was reassuring and offered more directional support than I expected.

Classes for graduate students are generally held in the evening for a three-hour span that can be both hard to plan for and long if the planning is not inclusive of activities. Part of what I enjoyed most about being a principal was the staff development I was responsible for preparing, sharing, and supervising. The time spent preparing and presenting staff development as a principal seems to have been beneficial as I planned classes and remained cognizant of the need to vary instruction and relevancy.

I recall a few long nights as a graduate student and my intent and goal in preparing for my students was to ensure that all assignments were relevant, the relevancy was understood, the class shifted activities approximately every 30 minutes, and I modeled for them what I expected them to achieve as educational leaders. I also remind myself constantly when time gets short and there is a temptation to reduce my class planning time that these graduate students paid for my leadership and expertise, deserve to get the most out of every class, and will know if I am unprepared.

I jokingly refer to my briefcase on wheels as my Mary Poppins bag of professor tricks because I keep markers, white boards, chart paper, and a plastic accordion file for each class labeled with each evening’s materials. I was one of those elementary education majors many years ago who loved the materials and purchased school supplies every year right along with the students, so the opportunity to teach at the graduate level allows me to use exciting materials from my bag of tricks. I have found in these first 60 days that the students, although a little surprised at first, do not mind being asked to answer questions written on large post-it notes lining the walls as they do a gallery walk or using three colors of markers to designate varied meanings and intents in journal articles. It is important to model for them what they should model for their teachers who will then hopefully use what they learn as instructional strategies in their classrooms.

8.4 Research

I have noticed that professors vary in aptitudes and likes when considering the three-pronged university model of teaching, service, and research. Some are dedicated to the service model and spend hours in schools and on campus committees and governance entities while others are admired advisors to students and dedicated to teaching. Then there are the researchers.

The researchers produce multiple articles and book chapters from their extensive and frequently updated research agendas and do so with seemingly little effort and in short periods of time. My advice for those who are transitioning from the practitioner arena is to write before you transition, use what you can from your dissertation, and carve out time every day to work on something related to research.

During the university's orientation for new faculty, a professor from the English department offered what seemed a logical approach to research and writing and I have worked to create my research agenda so that it can be fulfilled in this pattern. She said she often has approximately four projects going at any given time. Sometimes the projects are at varying stages of completion with one being only in the formative stage and others being scattered throughout and one in the editing and revising stage. She expressed her need to work on more than one thing at a time and found her writing to be more productive and meaningful when she does. I identified with her thinking patterns and have adopted her method. Once you decide to transition to the professorship, you will take the advice of colleagues, glean what applies to your learning and working style and put it to use. Whatever that information may be regarding research, realize that the level of writing exceeds the doctoral program and takes many more hours. It is easy to have days pass and wonder where the hours went without addressing anything on your writing agenda.

Collaboration with colleagues is not only a good idea, but it is encouraged. Collaboration outside the educational leadership department with professors in other areas is also highly encouraged. I was pleased to meet a professor from the counseling department at the new faculty orientation who has similar research interests, and we have plans to publish an article together. I also have plans to work with my departmental colleagues to pull various pieces about middle schools together and put them forward. I have been impatient with myself in the area of research because in graduate school, papers and projects were assigned and due within very short amounts of time. My expectation was that without running a campus, I should be producing many articles per semester. It has taken this first 60 days to get to a point where I have mental clarity to earnestly develop a research agenda and know enough about my colleagues and their interests in research to work collaboratively as a researcher. I understand, however, that regardless of circumstances, I must write. Promotion and tenure will not happen without it.

8.5 Knowing your Place

When I was a principal, I always encouraged new faculty and sometimes those who became outspoken at inappropriate times to know their place and understand the venues and means appropriate for certain suggestions and discussions. The same should be understood as a junior faculty member seeking tenure. Tedious faculty meetings and decisions that are seemingly mundane and drawn-out and often have a clear solution are best left to be addressed by those with more time invested in the department or college. I have an opinion and see opportunities to offer it; however, I understand as a former leader that new faculty cannot understand some issues enough to make valuable contributions within the first 60 days and the vocalization of my opinion could both prolong the discussion even further and indicate my novice ignorance of the value some topics have to various stakeholders. I find that my opinion is best shared in the small department meetings with three to four colleagues who can help me understand the historical significance of issues and thus formulate more formidable offerings in the future.

9 Conclusion

The urgency with which I carried out my duties as a school administrator is replaced with thoroughness in the professorship. The first 60 days at the university level are an intense, slow motion version of the days in the first week of school in K-12 education. A valued colleague and Director of Curriculum in my

former school district and I once talked about all of the balls an educational leader had to keep in the air at once: community requests; central office requests; personnel; staff development; discipline; finance; campus improvement plans; data decision making; phone calls; emails; and most importantly, working with students. The university has a parallel, but the balls are fewer and much larger and heavier representing the three concepts of service, teaching, and research with smaller balls representing genres such as political agendas and intricate, bureaucratic decision making processes that can throw a new professor off balance in the beginning if unprepared. Having just experienced the first 60 days and taken time to organize the events and evaluate my progress to this point, I am pleased and satisfied with the decision to transition from practitioner to professor.

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